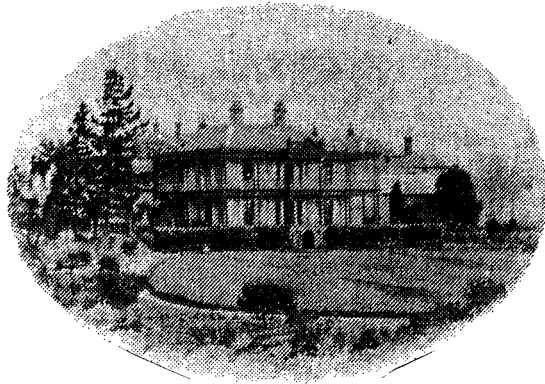


# RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS



*Hobartville*

# FRIENDS' SCHOOL



T H E F R I E N D S ' S C H O O L

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## FRIENDS' SCHOOL

The foundation of Friends' School was first proposed in 1884, when a group of parents requested Joseph Benson Mather to inquire whether an English member of the Society of Friends would be willing to come to Tasmania to start a school, although only a small number of Friend pupils could be guaranteed. The London Yearly Meeting favoured the foundation of a school for Australian Friends and agreed that Hobart was a suitable place for it. They undertook to pay travelling expenses for a teacher and guarantee his salary for three years, if the Australian Friends could provide a suitable building. A sub-committee of the London Meeting for Sufferings was appointed to watch the interests of Australian Friends and the establishment of the school. A Hobart committee managed the school.

Foremost amongst the English Friends actively concerned with the school was Edwin Rayner Ransome (1824-1910), a London business man who lived at Wandsworth Common and was connected with the firm of S. & E. Ransome Ltd of 10 Essex Street, Strand, London, which advertised Ransome's patents, grindstones, artificial stone, lawn mowers, cranes, engine fittings, cement etc. He corresponded regularly with Joseph B. Mather and his son J. Francis Mather. With other Friends, including Isaac Sharp and J. B. Braithwaite, Edwin Ransome helped to raise funds and interviewed and appointed teachers on behalf of the Hobart Committee.

The first teacher was Samuel Clemes, who had been headmaster of Wigton Friends' School. With his wife and four children he sailed for Tasmania on the *Tainui* in August 1886, taking with him books, slides and other equipment contributed by English Friends.

The Hobart committee leased a house in Warwick Street and Friends School opened on 31 January 1887 with 33 boys and girls, increasing to 75 during the year and to 130 by 1890. Samuel Clemes was headmaster with assistants, Margaret Irvine, who remained on the staff until 1925, and two masters, also appointed in England. Henrietta Pierce was appointed as pupil teacher. Mrs Clemes ran the household and the first four boarders were taken in 1888. From the first, boys and girls and non-Friends were accepted. The non-Friends were indeed essential to maintain the school and paid slightly higher fees. This, as J.F. Mather frequently pointed out to his English correspondents, necessarily gave the school a broader character than English Friends' schools. Numbers of pupils grew steadily and in 1889 the committee borrowed £4000 from the Baptist Union and purchased property in Commercial Road, known as Hobartville with a house built in 1832. This remained the nucleus of the school, but alterations and additions were made frequently. A house in Argyle Street was rented for extra boarders in 1891 (there were then about 32) and three new classrooms were built. In 1892 a hospital was built, new bedrooms and extensions to the girls' gymnasium in 1894, a laboratory in 1905, a lecture and assembly hall in 1906 (with a donation from Priscilla Peckover, one of many English benefactors). A list of building alterations and additions is given in a commemorative booklet published in 1947, *Sixty Years* (F4/54).

Shortly after its foundation the school became known as Friends' High School, until E. E. Unwin, appointed headmaster in 1924, reverted to the simple Friends' School, as used initially by the founding committee.

In 1893 an English Friend, James Smith Holdsworth, took over the mortgage of £4000 (and an additional £500) from the Baptist Union. His nephew Charles J. Holdsworth also took an active interest in the school and eventually took over much of the work done by Edwin R. Ransome on behalf of the school. Charles J. Holdsworth of Kendal, Westmorland or, from 1900, Alderley Edge, Cheshire, England, was Clerk to the Australian Committee of the London Meeting for Sufferings. He helped to raise funds, engage teachers etc. His earlier letters dealt mainly with finances, mortgage, etc. but from 1900 he wrote more frequently on more general matters of school administration and addressed his letters to Francis Mather more intimately as "Dear Frank" instead of "Dear Friend". In 1918 he wrote that he was getting too deaf to carry on with the Meeting for Sufferings.

These English Friends played a most important part in the management of the school, especially in finding and interviewing prospective teachers and raising funds. In 1903, at the request of the Hobart Committee, the arrangement was made more formal. The school came under the control of the London Yearly Meeting, with a local committee of management in Hobart. An endowment fund was begun and the trustees of the fund assumed responsibility for the mortgage, which was finally paid off in 1910. In 1923 the school was transferred to the General Meeting of Friends for Australia, which appointed a committee or board of governors to manage the school.

The Hobart Friend, Joseph Benson Mather, who first proposed the foundation of a Friends' School and acted as chairman and secretary of the Hobart group of Friends concerned with the school, retired in 1887 after seeing the school opened and he died in 1890. His son Joseph Francis Mather continued the work for thirty five years. The correspondence between the Mathers and the English Friends, Edwin R. Ransome and Charles J. Holdsworth, gives an exceptionally detailed record of the progress of the school. Indeed these personal letters are the most informative and fascinating series amongst the school records and run from 1885 until 1923. The school records also include annual statements of account and reports, and the minutes of the meetings of governors from 1923.

J. Francis Mather's correspondence, as chairman of the committee, but written between personal friends and colleagues, reveals more of the aims and problems of the school managers than would be the case with more official records. When copies of J. F. Mather's own letters exist they record his aims and hopes for the school and his plans for building development, not all of which were possible owing to lack of funds. He describes the work of the school, his pleasure at successes, such as the three passes in the first University of Tasmania public examinations in 1891, and the setbacks and problems of the school. The housekeeper and a boy boarder died of influenza in 1891 and an epidemic of measles in 1893 reduced the number of admissions temporarily. E. R. Ransome and C.J. Holdsworth were always ready with both sympathy and practical help and advice. A small fire in a woodshed in 1893 was amusingly described by Francis Mather to demonstrate the different characters and abilities of the teaching staff.

Finding teachers of sufficiently high calibre was a matter of great concern. Many of Mather's letters describe the qualifications he expected of teachers and his standards were high. Both E. R. Ransome and C. J. Holdsworth helped to find, interview and appoint teachers for the school, and an elaborate cable code was devised for more speedy communication between the two countries. In spite of the difficulties of lack of funds and few applicants measuring up to the high standards required, most of the teachers appointed were of a high calibre and made their mark in the school's history.

The letters show how much was due to the first headmaster, Samuel Clemes, and his family. Clemes had studied at the Flounders Institute, after a brief early career as a draper, and had undertaken mission work in Madagascar before he became head of Wigton Friends' School. E. R. Ransom wrote of his appointment in 1886 "He has not a very commanding authoritative way but there is much more in him . . . a thoroughness about him and a quiet consciousness of being able to accomplish what he undertakes". His wife had experience as a teacher in France and Germany and with an Irish family of Friends, the Peases. Clemes and his small body of assistant teachers in the first few years laid the foundation of a broadly based education for boys and girls, including many out of school activities for both boarders and day pupils. Other members of Samuel Clemes' family, his sister and cousin and later his daughters and son joined the teaching staff. Unfortunately Samuel Clemes was afflicted with a long and serious illness in 1890 and again in 1899.

This was one of the worst setbacks the school had to suffer. Not only was Samuel Clemes absent for a long time but the effects of his illness caused tension amongst the other staff and was also obvious to parents. There were several resignations from the staff and the English correspondents were kept busy. Eventually Samuel Clemes left the school and on his recovery he together with his family started his own school, Leslie House, which was renamed Clemes College after his death and was merged again with Friends School in 1945.

There were a few further staffing difficulties in the 1900s, but the school continued to grow, especially under headmasters E. J. Gower (1901-1903, 1908-1916) and E. E. Unwin (1924-1944).

A pictorial record of the spirit and progress of the school is provided by an excellent

series of photographs taken by the school photographic club, established and encouraged by some of the early masters. There are many photographs of the staff and pupils, boarders and other Friends on picnic excursions, girls playing cricket, boys playing marbles, sports teams, and views of the school inside and out. Many of the photographs were taken in the 1890s. Some were used to illustrate the school magazine *School Echoes*, started in 1890, which also contained many contributions from pupils describing school activities and topical events. Other pupils' essays were written between 1888 and 1900 by members of a school club founded in 1888 known as "The Hobartville Association".

In 1903, writing to E. R. Ransome, Francis Mather described the aims of the school as not only for building moral character but also for the "laying of the foundation of the inwardness and spirituality in religion, that steadiness of judgement, that true republican feeling, which abolishes class feeling and exclusiveness, that refined simplicity of life and that right estimate of the value of time which has characterised the typical Friend" (F4/6(229).

For further information on the history of the school see:  
William Nicolle Oats, *The Rose and the Waratah, the Friends School Hobart formation and development 1832-1945* Hobart (1979)